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ABSTRACT

Parents, peers, teachers, counselors, and siblings all exert an influence on the educational and occupational decisions made by students. Of all these of persons, however, parents have the greatest influence. Mothers are the major influence on their daughters' career aspirations and choice, whereas fathers are the primary influence on their sons' career decisions. Because children see their parents as role models, parental encouragement or discouragement is highly significant in influencing children toward nontraditional careers. The literature indicates that the way to break down barriers keeping males and females from entering nontraditional classes and careers is to present parents and children alike with factual employment opportunity information and inform them of the necessary skills, abilities, and aptitudes necessary for various careers and also to help parents realize their effect as a major role model in the children's career-related decision making. Therefore, teachers, counselors, and administrators should involve parents in school-based career education/career guidance programs; be trained to increase parents' ability to help in their children's career decision making; increase students' awareness of nontraditional careers; use various media to show nontraditional workers; actively recruit, encourage, and welcome nontraditional students in all classes; invite workers from nontraditional occupations from the local community to make presentations to classes and parents; have parent workshops to train them to reinforce nonstereotypic activities; and invite employers to classes to speak on the various qualities they are seeking in candidates for different jobs. A three-page list of references concludes the document. (MN)

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THE INFLUENCE OF PARENTS ON THE EDUCATIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL DECISION MAKING OF THEIR CHILDREN: REDUCING SEX ROLE STEREOTYPING IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

Although attempts and gains have been made in the area of reducing sex-role stereotyping and bias in vocational education, there still exists a need for further equity. Females continue to dominate the traditionally female vocational classes and occupations, and likewise for males. Research on the reasons for the continuance of occupational sex stereotyping indicates the strong influence of significant people in directing the occupational plans of students. There are definite biases which society has as a whole, and career expectations for males and females within society. This has lead to barriers existing for males and females in non-traditional courses and careers.

One subgroup of significant people is parents, who--according to various studies--exert some amount of influence in their child's selection of courses, and occupational training, and ultimately, an occupation. Their degree of influence must be identified, in order to implement strategies for reducing sex-role stereotyping and bias in vocational education.

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With role models being such a primary influence, there exists a need to identify who the role models are and the degree they influence occupational choice in students. Only then can school personnel develop methods of working with these people to reduce sex stereotyping in vocational classes.

Influential People in Occupational Choice

Through the review of literature, the following people have been identified as the most significant people/role models in the lives of students:

1. Parents
2. Peers
3. Teachers
4. Counselors
5. Siblings

The importance of these people were the subject of numerous studies, which also revealed other influential factors such as interests, abilities, goals, and geographic region, in the career decisions of males and females. In her study on selection of education as a career, Johnson (1983) identified four reasons college freshmen education majors chose a teaching career: family influence, positive and negative examples of teachers, experience, and personal benefits. Sandler (1982) added to parental influence by concluding that parents and peers are both very important in pressuring women students towards traditional vocational courses. This pressure--along with lack of information on specific employment opportunities, lack of preparation in certain skills, and lack of encouragement by counselors and school personnel--constitute the majority of the barriers women face in their access to nontraditional vocational classes and careers. Veres and Carmichael (1981) added to the previously mentioned influential people by saying that parents, peers, and siblings are important in influencing students towards nontraditional careers.

Vetter (1977) added counselors and administrators to the list of influential people by saying that they tend to reinforce stereotypical behavior in male and female students. As a result, the differential treatment students receive--on the basis of their gender--reduces the career options they see available to themselves.

The importance of peers extends to the non-traditional student worrying about how his/her peers will react to him/her enrolling in a non-traditional class. The approval or disapproval of his/her peers--in regards to class selection--is of importance to the male/female student. Going further, Snell (1977) discovered that the barriers males and females face in entering non-traditional classes are not only a result of other people--external--but can become internal. That is, the student's own fear of their peers' reactions becomes a motivating force behind their educational choices.

These five subgroups--parents, peers, teachers, counselors, and siblings--make up the people student look to for guidance, knowledge, encouragement, approval, and acceptance. They constitute the majority of the student's time through high school and have the greatest

opportunities to serve as influential forces in their career decision making.

Parental Influence

The majority of research on the significant people in influencing student's occupational decisions focuses on the importance of parents as the most influential people in the career path of males and females. A New York project conducted by Ott (1978) on high school sex-role stereotyping revealed that those students enrolled in traditional courses for their sex stated that parents and counselors were more important than peers in influencing their occupational program. Mills' (1980) study also revealed the parents as the primary sources of influence on the selection of careers/courses--with teachers coming in second.

Some studies sought to analyze the beginnings of occupational orientation, guidance, encouragement, and possible stereotyping in the lives of males and females. One such study conducted by Navin and Sears (1980) indicated that career development starts early in childhood and continues throughout life, with parents being a significant factor in this developmental process. They are the primary people in a child's life in the early years, and continue to be so throughout adolescence--along with educators and peers. In these elementary years, children look to parents for approval and as role models. Parents pass on a vast amount of information about life and the role of the male and female within society through spoken and written words, and largely through their actions.

As the child spends the majority of the formative years with parents (family), the child uses these individuals as his/her sole references for the "typical" roles and behaviors males or females should assume. They look at how the parents treat each other, the other children, and males and females outside the family unit. He/she will then incorporate these attitudes/actions into his/her own value system.

Lavine (1982) concluded that there is a tendency for children to associate an occupation with one gender, and they are strongly influenced by their parents' own occupations, beliefs, and attitudes. This is not unusual--due to their limited access to adult role models--but is critical because it is their first exposure to what their role will be in society.

Even up to college, the parents exert influence on the vocational choice of their children, despite the influence of other significant people and the decreasing time students may spend with parents. Venerable (1974) reported in a survey of 300 freshmen college students on the perceived influence of the parents on vocational choice, that while students felt they ultimately made their own vocational choice, most "sought parental advice on important issues." The parent continues to be the reference and guide for the male's/female's future, long after the formative years.

The desire to discover parental influence is not unique to the United States. Poole (1983) discovered in her study on the career decision-making process of Australian youth that at age 14 the major source of influence in career decision making was parents. Sube (1981) conducted a study in East Germany and arrived at the

conclusions that parents and friends are the major sources of influence in choosing a career, with parents being the decisive factor in 34% of the adolescents.

Parents and Socialization

Parents are largely responsible for socialization processes that lead to vocational choices, by affecting the child's perception of what is "expected" or "desired" of him/her in terms of a career path. This socialization begins in the child's early years, with the parent(s) being the example(s) as to the role of the male and female within the family and their role as a worker/citizen in society. Researchers such as Miller and Swanson (Franklin and Scott, 1970) hypothesized that families classified as entrepreneurial emphasized that their child rely on internal self control--in terms of selecting a career path--whereas bureaucratic families emphasized submitting to external control or what others expected. Those parents that encouraged the child to be all he/she wanted or could be, taught them to rely on what role they themselves aspired towards; whereas those parents who assumed a stronger role in directing their child towards a career, taught them to fit into what society has prescribed for males and females. But Franklin and Scott (1970) found no support for the theory by Miller and Swanson--which attempted to correlate the parents' power base with the child's perception of his/her own control over choices in occupations. They concluded that the parents' style of authority within the family had no bearing on the type of career the male/female aspired towards or the role he/she expected himself/herself to fit in.

Other studies focus on the effects of socialization on career development, expectations, and lifestyle--with parents being part of this socialization process. Shoffner and Klemer (1973) focused their study on the parents' responsibilities in socialization processes. They found that parents lead the children towards specific vocational choices, and thus, educators need to help parents learn how to "be more effective in their children's vocational growth"--through meetings and counseling.

Parents can be a most effective way of broadening their child's knowledge of careers available to them. Most children will not on their own seek out all the possible options, but will listen to a role model relaying career information. This idea was the basis for a study where Walters (1974) concluded that parents can be major facilitators of career information to their children if they are given adequate training and material on their child's skills, abilities, and interests. This is where schools--and particularly the teachers--can take responsibility of providing a variety of training methods on understanding the child, and using them as a basis for non-biased socialization.

In their report on career expectations of youth, Hotchkiss and Chiteji (1981) focused on the differences/similarities of the expectations of youth and expectations of parents for the youth. They sought to compare these results by interviewing sophomores and juniors and their parents, and then predicting what both group's expectations would be at the student's senior level. The conclusions were:

1. Career expectations of youth were influenced by expectations held for them by their parents.

2. Influence of peers was much smaller than the influence of parents.

3. Development of career expectations remains stable over time.

They also noted the importance of getting a wide variety of career information to adolescents as early as possible.

Veres and Carmichael (1981) went further in their study on reducing sex-role stereotyping in occupational education programs by concluding that by the eighth grade there was evidence of sex-role socialization. And while most schools had not instituted career education prior to this, the socialization process had already been a major part of the child's upbringing, with parents, peers, and educators being the primary people in the lives of students.

The Mother's Influence

The majority of research concerning parental influence specifically examines the mother as a role model. Haber (1980) surveyed 50 college females on the significance of the mother and she found that the attitudes and beliefs of the mother were influential in the career choice of the children.

But not only are attitudes and beliefs important, but several researchers have emphasized the importance of the working mother on career choices. One of these studies was conducted by Stevens and Boyd (1980) who concluded that working mothers are more likely to have daughters who choose to work, and that the daughter's career choice is likely to similar to the mother's career.

Likewise, Auster and Auster (1981) also included maternal employment as a factor that has a direct correlation to the career choices women make--particularly those who select a nontraditional career. However, in her Wyoming study, Church (1974) concluded that no "significant relationship existed between a girl's career objectives and whether her mother worked outside the home."

But even if the mother has a traditional role, Burlin's study (1976) found an association between the mother's occupational status and the occupational aspirations of females. The females tended to see their mother as a role model and would select a similar occupation.

Another study focusing on the female who expected to be a homemaker and non employed also found the relationship of the mother's occupational status and daughter's aspirations. Falkowski and Falk's (1983) data revealed a significant relationship between the non-employed mother and the female who saw herself as a homemaker at age 30.

A unique approach to the mother-daughter relationship was the basis for a study on whether parents foster the development of their own type of personality in their son/daughter. Grandy and Stahmann (1974) found a personality-type relationship between mothers and daughters, but no significant relationship between the mother and the

son. But, the mother's career is only one part of the major impact she can have on her daughter's own career choice.

While much of the research on the mother dealt with only the daughter, Lamb (1982) also included the son. He suggested that "sons and daughters of employed mothers have less sex-stereotyped expectations and values than kids of unemployed mothers." He assumes that the sons will see other females as being capable of securing a job, contributing to society, and able to be a provider as well.

The working mother should inform her son/daughter about what her job involves as well as to encourage others to discuss the nature of their jobs with her children. According to Lunde (1980) the mother should include the child in social events involving working adults, so that they will see a broad range of careers which are available and receive some personal attention from these adults. This also allows the child to see work as something positive and a way to work towards their potential.

This positive attitude towards work by the parent is very significant in influencing females towards a career, as Lunneborg (1982) discovered in her study. She noted parents and other adults as being the guiding light for women. The son/daughter sees these achieving role models who are also sources of encouragement to them in their career aspirations, and seeks to identify and incorporate some of their qualities in their own lives.

Studies have also analyzed the importance of the parent's educational attainment on the child's career choice. Pope (1982) conducted a study to discover what factors were most influential in women receiving administrative positions. Among the major findings were that:

1. A majority of parents of administrative women encouraged their daughters to continue education.

2. Almost twice as many mothers of administrative females had completed college degrees as compared to the mothers of non-administrative females.

3. Over 50% of administrative women felt closest to their mother in childhood, as compared to 37% of non-administrative women.

4. Over 25% of mothers of administrative women were employed in education or other professions as compared to 18% of mothers of non-administrative women.

Father/Son

Just as a significant relationship exists for the mother and daughter, research has focused on the importance of the father-son relationship. Mortimer (1974) saw the tendency for the son to select a career similar to the father's career. He concluded that not only the occupation may be passed on, but the values the father has towards work may influence the son's vocational choice. According to another study by Mortimer (1975), the closeness of the father and son is also an important variable.

The son's relationship to his father involves his identification with his father and his life--occupation and education. Jackson and Meara (1977) conducted a study which involved identifying low and high identification senior males and conducting a follow-up five years later to see if the groups remained constant in their identification to the father. What he found was that there were differences between the low and high groups in terms of occupational status, educational achievement, and their outlook on the future. Thus, Jackson discovered that the importance of the father continues to be an influential factor past the adolescent years.

Werts (1967) delved into the specific aspect of the father's occupation and son's career choice. His results showed that "certain types of father's occupations were associated with similar types of career choices by sons." For example, sons of fathers who were in teaching or guidance were likely to select a career as a teacher, administrator, clergyman, or social worker, or where the father was in the medical field, the son was likely to choose a medical career.

Church (1974) discovered that boys' career objectives identify more with their fathers' occupation than girls' with their mothers. She saw the father as a strong force in the sons' occupational choice.

Father/Daughter

Many studies, however, have analyzed the importance of the father in influencing the educational and career plans of the daughter. As with the mother, the father's attitude is very important--as he can serve as an encourager or discourager for his daughter's pursuit of a traditional or non-traditional career.

Auster and Auster (1981) concluded that the female may choose a nontraditional occupation but her decision was a result of her immediate environment.

One of these environmental factors is the father's attitude. His perception of women in the workforce and relaying of his perception to his daughter, can be a positive or negative influence on her future career plans.

The father's encouragement for the daughter comes not only from his perceptions but from his awareness. Canora (1981) developed a training package which recognizes the importance of parents being aware of the different vocational programs available, their value to students, background on non-traditional occupations, and a forecast of anticipated vacancies. Only with this proper background, can the father (or mother) seek to encourage the female (or male) towards pursuing a career (traditional or nontraditional) or furthering education.

Likewise, Haber's (1980) results concerning sex roles showed parental encouragement to be a major factor in career selection by the daughter. But Ott (1978) concluded in her New York study that most students were unaware of what their parents' attitudes were towards them pursuing/studying a variety of fields. Her parent survey revealed that while some were in favor of traditional class enrollments, a larger percentage indicated support for the non-traditional male/female student than the actual percentage of males and females currently enrolled in these non-traditional courses.

The daughter not only is influenced by encouragement/support from the father, but will look to him as a role model. He will influence her in a positive direction if he is an achieving role model, according to Lunneborg's (1982) study on role model influencers. And Mills' (1980) findings included that it wasn't so much the nature of the father's work that was significant, but the father himself--that is, his perspective of his career and its importance in his life.

Pope's (1982) study on women public school administrators and factors that lead them to this career aspiration, included the father's role. Among the findings were:

1. A larger percentage of fathers of non-administrative women had not completed high school as compared to fathers of administrative women.

2. Over 25% of fathers of administrative women were employed in education or other professions as compared to 18% of the fathers of non-administrative women.

Burlin (1976) also found a significant relationship between the daughter's occupational aspirations and the father's education. If the father had attained higher education, he was more likely to encourage his daughter to pursue a career--which the majority of the time meant higher education.

Conclusions

1. The parents are the most influential people in the occupational and educational decision making of their children.

2. The mother is the major influence in the career aspirations and, ultimately, the career choice of the daughter.

3. The father is the primary influence in the career aspirations and career choice of the son.

4. Parental encouragement is highly significant in influencing the children towards non-traditional careers.

5. Parents are seen as role models by their children, and either promote or hinder males and females from selecting traditional or non-traditional classes and careers.

6. The occupational status of the mother is highly significant in the career aspirations of the daughter, and she will most likely select a career which is similar to her mother's.

7. The way to begin breaking down barriers for males and females getting into nontraditional classes and careers is to inform the parents and children of factual employment opportunity information, and inform them of the necessary skills, abilities, and aptitudes for various careers; and help parents see their role as major role models in the career decision making of their children.

Recommendations

Based upon the research findings, the following are suggestions which the teacher, counselor, and administrator could implement in their own school system to help reduce sex bias and sex-role stereotyping.

Teachers, counselors, and administrators should:

1. Be made aware of the role of the parents in their student's vocational aspirations and be aware of the other influential factors in determining career decision making for students.

2. Involve parents in school-based career education/career guidance programs.

3. Be trained to increase the parents' ability to help in the career decision making of their children.

4. Inform parents of the various male/female non-traditional careers, and how to determine if their son or daughter has abilities/potential in this career area.

5. Increase their students' awareness of non-traditional careers and how to plan/prepare for these careers.

6. Make use of various media which show non-traditional workers.

7. Recruit, encourage, and welcome non-traditional students in all classes.

8. Speak to PTA groups concerning the non-traditional student.

9. Invite workers from non-traditional occupations from the local community to make presentations to classes, and invite parents to some or all of these presentations.

10. Have material readily available (counselor's office, library, or individual classrooms) on various careers in non-traditional careers and post-secondary training institutions where they can receive training.

11. Have a workshop to expose parents to facts relating to men/women and work, career choices for their children, and ways they can reinforce nonstereotypic activities.

12. Use various means of publicity--letters, newspapers, bulletins, memos, radio/television, and career fairs to promote vocational courses to <u>all</u> students.

13. Invite employers to speak to classes concerning various jobs and qualities they are looking for in employees.

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